consciousness. Isabel acquires a finer refinement of understanding and through the ordeal of consciousness in marriage she learns to perceive the subtle processes whereby 'good' is transformed into evil when, in the exercise of a good 'nature' or a good 'sensibility', one loses sight of the ethical interrelatedness between ends and means, and moral supremacy of good means over good ends.

Isabel is typically Jamesian in discovering, like Strether in *The Ambassadors* later, that the fuller life is *'a* matter of refining her consciousness by an ordeal of fire', Isabel's philosophic awareness of the complexities of human existence enable her to forget the pain and suffering, as predicted by the knowing Ralph, and to forgive the treacheries and deceptions of people like Osmond and Madame Merle. Isabel's return to her husband is, thus, both an affirmation and accep-tance of life - a double acceptance of life on its own terms and on Isabel's own terms. Commenting on Isabel's moral growth and aware-ness, Ward remarks :

> James does nothing to minimise the suffering with which Isabel must spend the rest of her fife, but he suggests that the acquired wisdom, the expansion of consciousness, repre-sents a development far higher not only of her life in America but higher than her life with Warburton or Good-wood would have been. When Isabel partakes of the Tree of Knowledge in the world of experience she is made force-fully aware of the presence of evil, but in a sense her earlier ambitions are fulfilled. She was perhaps corre'ct in pursuing her ideals, in accepting nothing but the fullest experience that life can offer.[53]

.The quest for 'the fullest experience' is thus a quest for refinement, in which the moral idealism of Isabel remains unimpaired, despite the Assaults of evil on it. The great lesson which she learns is that she ^should neither renounce her ideals, *nor make life conform to them, and •that her ultimate triumph in life is the preservation of the integrity of

her character. The whole moral action-of *The Portrait of a Lady* thus jsprin0s *from* a sharply dramatised ontology of human choice, which is fully explored in Isabel's marriage to Osmond, Isabel's refinement lies in her willing acceptance of moral responsibility, and in he/ determination to be true to herself.[5]* The final intimation, which sets her .on her chastened return, comes to her at Gardencourt, - a composite -spatial metaphor of idyllic innocence and chivalric virtue - which .is -Jbotb a symbol of uncorrupted innocence ang^Iso. ,a redemptive seat o/